What Can I Believe About Christian Missions?

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By

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Foreword

Thousands of students do not take Christian missions for granted. They ask, as they do of every other human activity, "Why should there be such a thing at all?" When they ask in good faith they deserve a reasonable answer.

Dr. Latourette was successively a traveling secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement, a member of the faculty of Yale-in-China, and professor of history in Denison University. He is now D. Willis James Professor of Missions and Oriental History in Yale University. He has written *"The Development of China," "A History of Early Relations Between the United States and China, 1784-1844," "The Development of Japan," "The Christian Basis of World Democracy," "A History of Christian Missions in China,"* and the articles on the History of China, Chinese Literature and the Chinese Eastern Railway, in the last edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica.

From this background he brings to the answer of the foregoing question an exceptional combination of the missionary point of view and the historical method.

What Can I Believe About Christian Missions?

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OPINIONS as to the value of the missionary enterprise vary greatly. One journalist who has travelled extensively comes out publicly in enthusiastic endorsement of missions, and another, who made a trip around the world deliberately to investigate missions and who confesses that he set out with a decided prejudice against them, returns singing their praises. A few years ago a distinguished American engineer who had spent several years in China, and who had opportunity for wide observation, declared that every progressive and hopeful movement in the new China has somewhere a missionary back of it. On the other hand, other journalists and travellers who have had equal facilities for gathering information denounce missions in no measured terms. They declare that the missionary is destroying old cultures,

that he is responsible for the depopulation of some of the Pacific islands, that the religious presuppositions which underlie his work are invalid, that the majority of missionaries are dogmatic and ill-trained; and that, while the best of them are heroic, most of them are visionary bunglers who, with the best intentions in the world, are meddling harmfully in complex situations.

Other foreign observers, more temperate in their estimates, gladly admit that through his schools, his hospitals, his social service activities, and especially through the example of unselfish, high-minded living, the missionary has been of great service to the land of his adoption, but that unwittingly or unintelligently he has been destructive to much that was worth while in the older culture, that he has been the tool of aggressive Western imperialism, and that, measured by his success in attaining his primary objective, the winning of real converts to his faith and the establishment of a Christian community which will have a permanent and growing influence in its

environment, he has been essentially a failure.

Opinions vary also among non-Christian Chinese, Japanese, Hindus and others. Some denounce what they call the missionary's presumption in attempting to alter the religious beliefs and social institutions of their native land—to teach ethics to peoples who are morally equal and perhaps superior to his own. They eye him as the forerunner of political interference and annexation by Western powers and as the agent of Occidental cultural conquest, and claim that for the purpose of obtaining funds for his work he gives an exaggerated picture of the evils in the lands in which he works. Other non-Christians, in their judgment of missions, are warm in their praise, and still others, while they see much to condemn, temper their disapprobation with praise.

In the light of such conflicting judgments by supposedly competent reporters, it is not surprising that the average American or Canadian student regards foreign missions with considerable mis-

giving. He wonders why, if the enterprise is all its advocates claim it to be, there is not more uniformity of approval from non-missionary and non-Christian observers.

Background for Appraisal

Before attempting an answer, it is well to realize something of the scope of the enterprise, not by way of argument, but as a background for an appraisal. The first fact that presents itself is that this is one of the major activities of mankind. To it are being devoted thousands of lives and millions of dollars. Its representatives are to be found on each of the continents and in a large proportion of the islands of the sea. By the latest available figures, there are about twenty-eight thousand Protestant and nearly twenty-two thousand Roman Catholic missionaries. The average annual total contribution to Protestant missions for the years 1925, 1926 and 1927 was nearly fifty-seven million dollars, and the corresponding figure for the Roman Catholic enterprise, while not obtainable, certainly also

mounts into the millions. Protestant foreign mission boards count over six and a half million members (baptized communicant and noncommunicant)—or as much as the population of New York City. Rome estimates that there are about twelve million Roman Catholics in what we are accustomed to call non-Christian lands. In educational institutions maintained by Protestant missionaries are about two and a half million pupils—more than in all the schools of the State of New York. Approximately twenty-three thousand of these are in about a hundred colleges and universities. The Protestant missionary staff includes over thirteen hundred physicians who give over eleven million treatments a year in more than twenty-five hundred hospitals and dispensaries. Protestants distribute abroad annually over ten million copies of the Bible and portions of the Bible in hundreds of languages and dialects—many of which have been reduced to writing for the first time for the purpose of putting the Scriptures into them.

Not only is the missionary movement

world-wide in its extent, but, also, it is taking a prominent place in the lives of the peoples among whom it is conducted. In Japan several of the members of the lower house of the diet and presidents of Imperial universities are professing Christians, and one of the best known leaders of social reform has inaugurated a daring program to increase the membership of the Christian churches to a million. In China the most influential Chinese that this generation has known, Sun Yat-sen, was a professing Christian, educated largely in mission schools in Hawaii and Hongkong, and the head of the National Government, Chiang K'ai-shek, with more than half of the present chiefs of the main departments of that government, are either professing Christians or received much of their training in Christian schools. In India some of the best of the schools are maintained by missionaries, and membership in Christian churches offers to many outcastes their only emancipation. In the Near East the splendid work of such colleges and universities as those founded and

maintained through American missionaries at Constantinople, Smyrna, Beirut, and Cairo is widely known. In Africa scores of languages have been given a written form by the missionary.

A Pragmatic Test

Whether one approves of them or not, then, Christian foreign missions must be taken into account by all students who would understand the world in which we live. In this paper an attempt at an appraisal of missions is made on the basis of the effects of the enterprise on the lives of people. Are men, women and children better off in this present age because the missionary has come to them? Are missions, in their effect upon individuals in this life, good or bad? Are their influences upon that political, social and economic structure which conditions the welfare of human beings of this and of future generations wholesome or unwholesome?

It is, of course, necessary first of all to settle upon the criteria by which we can measure the effects of missions—or

of any other movement—upon human society. Here again we are on debatable ground, for, strange though it may seem, the sociologists and the anthropologists are by no means agreed as to just what these criteria are. The man on the street, who knows nothing about such scholarly indecisiveness, would probably say that if because of missions men are better clothed and fed, if they have a more orderly government, if there is less of fear and cruelty and hatred in their lives, if their marriage institutions and family life not only carry on the race but encourage the individuals who grow up under them to self-control and self-respect, if there is more of honesty, if there is added readiness to sacrifice personal interests for the common weal, if there is an increase of knowledge, if among nations and individuals there is greater friendliness, understanding, and willingness to coöperate, then missions are abundantly worth while. In this opinion the hypothetical man on the street is undoubtedly right.

In the next place, it must be recognized that missions are only one of sev-

eral movements which are profoundly affecting the human race and which are revolutionizing the cultures of European and particularly of non-European peoples. During the time that modern missions have been in existence—the past century and a half or less—the increased knowledge and mastery of man's physical environment have altered profoundly the life of the race. Here it is necessary only to remind ourselves of the changes that have been and are being wrought by the application of steam and electricity to machinery, by the factory system, by the steamship, the railway, the telegraph, and, latterly, by the automobile, the airplane, and the radio. The contrast between the age of our great-grandfathers, to whom the South Seas were a land of mystery, and that of ourselves, when a gentleman, sitting in his private yacht in an Italian port, talks by wireless telephone with people in a city in Australia which a century and a half ago was not in existence, and by pressing a button in that same yacht, without assistance of even an intervening wire, starts the elec-

tric lights in that same Australian city, is only one of the bewildering and familiar examples of the transition through which, in the past four or five generations, man has made himself to pass. Manifestly, in such a world no inherited political, social or economic institution can be stable.

A Revolution of Cultures

This increased knowledge and mastery of man's physical environment was first achieved by peoples of European stock, whether in Europe, the Americas, or elsewhere, and these peoples still far outdistance others in their utilization of them. Armed with the appliances which this knowledge and mastery gave them, European peoples have penetrated into every corner of the earth. Usually they have been in search of markets and raw materials for their factories, or of labor for the enlarged plantations which their factories made desirable. Wherever they have gone, they have conquered—if not both culturally and politically, then at least culturally. They have explored and

partitioned Negro Africa, and the old African tribal culture is crumbling. They have mastered and peopled the Western Hemisphere, Australia, and New Zealand, and, except in a few tropical fastnesses, the aboriginal population has survived only by accepting the white man's civilization. The major part of the surface of Asia is politically subject to the Occidental. Where, as in Japan and Turkey, political independence has been retained, it has been at the price of a thoroughgoing recasting of the older culture in the molds of the modern West. China is in the throes of the revolution brought by the coming of the Occident, and to regain her jeopardized political autonomy is losing her cultural distinctiveness. In India even the most pronounced nationalists do not dare to advocate the complete expulsion of all Western appliances and culture. The result has been a world-wide revolution which has shaken non-European peoples from their former moorings even more completely than it has those of European descent. Here and there, as in some of

the islands of the South Seas, under the impact a tribe has all but died out. In other lands, as in China, tragic suffering and bewilderment have resulted.

For this impact of European upon non-European cultures, missions are in part responsible. It was, for example, a missionary, David Livingstone, who had much to do with the exploration of Africa. In some places, as in Uganda and the Hawaiian Islands, the occupation by a particular white nation can be in large part ascribed to the missionary. In many instances, as in the coming of modern medicine to China, the leading rôle in the introduction of some phase of Western culture was taken by the missionary.

However, in every land the penetration by European civilization would have taken place even though a missionary had never set foot beyond his native land. The missionary has modified the irruption of European among non-European peoples and cultures, but that irruption would have occurred without him. *In estimating the results of missions, the*

important question always is, not whether the missionary was responsible for the abandonment of the older culture, but what changes he is making in the attendant revolution. Judged by the criteria which we have set forth, are these good or bad?

What Do Missions Contribute?

In attempting to arrive at an estimate of these modifications by the missionary, it must be recognized that within the missionary enterprise there is marked diversity of objectives, methods, and organization. Exceptions, therefore, can be found to almost every generalization, and widely different estimates can be arrived at, each based upon facts. In spite of all this diversity, however, some generalizations can be made which hold for all branches of the enterprise. Practically all missionaries are agreed on the infinite value of human personality. The vast majority believe that each human life goes on endlessly, and that, through the truth revealed in the Christian Gospel, it is possible for men and women here

and now to begin to live a life of greater dignity, self-respect, honesty, kindliness, quiet joy, and self-control—a life which will through eternity grow in these qualities. Practically every missionary would say that his major objective is to help make possible such a life for those to whom he goes.

An Unselfish Motive

This purpose means that the missionary's dominant motive is unselfish. The missionary wishes to work for the welfare of the people of his adoption. He dedicates himself to what he believes to be the well-being of those to whom he has been sent. Some of his actions may arise from mistaken judgment, and at times he may do harm when he meant good, but no one who has known well many missionaries, no matter of what branch of the Church, can doubt their heroism and their self-denial. Contrasted with the standards of living of the multitudes among whom they work, especially in China and India, the missionary may seem to be luxuriously housed and fed.

Compared with many foreign merchants and consuls, however, he lives very simply. No family, even at Chinese prices, can be extravagant and educate children on a salary of from $1,200 to $2,500.

A Superior Ability

Not only is the missionary unselfish. In training and native ability he is much above the average of his nation. Most Roman Catholic orders give to their men a prolonged education, seldom sending them out before their middle twenties. Protestant mission boards subject applicants to severe scrutiny. Not only must those who are accepted be of sound moral character and earnest religious life, but most of them must have graduated from a college and a professional school with a scholastic standing of average or better, and they must have a sense of humor, a record for working well with others, sound judgment, an absence of race prejudice, and freedom from vagaries and fanaticism, and they must have passed a rigorous physical examination. It is much harder to win an appointment

under some of the Protestant societies than it is to obtain a position on the foreign staff of one of our larger and better banking or commercial houses or in the American diplomatic service. It is not strange that a recent investigation of the records of graduates of Harvard and Yale shows that sons of missionaries have a higher average achievement than do the sons of any other professional group. Here and there, of course, are exceptions. Some freaks go as missionaries; on the whole, however, in idealism, character, and general culture, missions are contributing some of the very finest personnel of the Occident to non-Occidental peoples in this hour of great transition.

When one stops to think of it, the altruism of the missionary enterprise is amazing. Here are thousands of people, most of them well educated and above the average of their countrymen in native ability, living in alien lands, on small salaries, devoting themselves to peoples not their own, often in the face of criticism and opposition, and for no other reward than the sense of important work

well done. The millions of dollars that support them are contributed, again unselfishly, often by those of limited income, to aid races and lands whom most of the donors will never see and of whom they know little. No wonder that the motives are often misunderstood and misinterpreted.

A Check to Exploitation

As a corollary of his dominant purpose, the missionary champions against attempts at exploitation the cause of the people to whom he is sent. He has fought slavery, often at great risk to himself. He has consistently been a foe of the opium traffic, in China and elsewhere. He has opposed the trade in firearms and liquor, both of them especially disastrous to primitive peoples. He has taken the lead in trying to interpret sympathetically the peoples of other lands to his own country, thereby seeking to remove misunderstandings and what he believes to be unfair treatment. The friendliness of the United States toward China is often ascribed, and probably correctly, to the

fact that so large a proportion of American residents in China have been and are missionaries.

A Force Against Race Prejudice

Further, the missionary seeks to remove race prejudice and discrimination. One of the major topics for discussion at the meeting of the (Protestant) International Missionary Council at Jerusalem in 1928 was the pressing problem of race. A secretary of this Council has not only written one of the most thoughtful and progressive books on racial questions, but has served on a recent important British commission which has sought to deal with the acute racial situation in East Africa. In one very interesting mission in Japan, Japanese, Chinese, Americans and a Korean are working harmoniously on the same staff, the Korean and the Chinese having been invited by vote of the Japanese to help lesson the strain between the respective countries. In missionary vocabulary all terms which seem to savor of contempt, such at "native" and "heathen" are increasingly eschewed. Roman

Catholics, encouraged by the present Pope, are making rapid strides toward creating an indigenous as against a foreign clergy, and are raising several of these "native" priests to the episcopate. Protestants are even more quickly turning over the leadership of the organizations and institutions which they have built up in other lands to the nationals of these countries.

The Relief of Starvation

Because they have so valued human life, missionaries have sought to alleviate and where possible to remove physical suffering. Even those who might be supposed to be indifferent to conditions in this present life have shared in this concern. They have been active in famine relief, especially in the frequently recurring famines in modern China. Roman Catholics, and to a less degree Protestants, maintain in orphanages and train for a useful career thousands of children, most of whom would otherwise have perished. The great work of Near East Relief, while not officially missionary,

would probably not have been possible had it not been for missionaries.

Conscious that putting bread into the mouths of the starving is only a temporary expedient and may even increase the pressure of population upon subsistence, missionaries are seeking also to increase the food supply. The best agricultural and forestry school in all China was founded by missionaries and still depends chiefly upon Christians for its maintenance. A missionary in Shansi is introducing drought-resistant grain which in the extensive dry-farming regions of that province yields several times as much to the acre as do the native cereals. Four years ago, under missionary auspices, an unusually thorough survey of the rural situation in Korea was made with the purpose of enabling the churches to know how they might help to improve the intolerable economic condition of the farming population. At the present time, at the invitation of the International Missionary Council, Dr. Butterfield, formerly president successively of the agricultural colleges of Massachusetts and Michigan,

is making extended visits to Africa, India, and the Far East, for the purpose of counselling missionaries as to ways in which they can best help the farmers of these lands.

The Treatment of Disease

Missionary physicians and nurses are treating millions of patients. Further, in many places they are training young men and women for service in their own lands, equipping them with the best technique and ideals that the West knows. In China especially the modern medical and nursing professions arose out of the efforts of missionaries. The first dean of a nursing school anywhere in the world was appointed by the trustees of a Christian institution in Central China; and what is still the best medical school in the land is officially Christian and has on its board representatives of missionary societies.

Alleviation of Industrialism

Many missionaries have been awake to the exploitation of labor and the serious

damage to health and morals that often follow the introduction of the modern Western type of industry and mining into the non-European world. In the factory district of Shanghai a Christian college maintains a social center. There, too, a missionary has built some model houses, sanitary and comfortable. To keep from pauperizing the tenants and to encourage the erection of others as an investment, he has leased them at a rental which is within the reach of the pocketbook of the factory employees and which still pays a modest but sufficient return on the cost. Christian Chinese are here and there maintaining factories which in their treatment of employees are a pleasing contrast to many owned by others of their countrymen and would be considered progressive in the more experienced Occident. In Japan the most prominent Christian, Kagawa, inspired by the faith that he first learned from missionaries, has begun a number of movements and institutions to better the lot of the laborers in the factories which have multiplied so rapidly this past half-century.

In Japan also there is a Christian enterprise built around a missionary which, in addition to maintaining an importing business, is one of the largest architectural houses in the Orient. It not only turns back all profits into its philanthropic and religious activities but is governed by the workers and fixes wages according to needs and not according to skill. In the great mining region that centers at Johannesburg, in South Africa, thousands of men are brought in, often from tribes hundreds of miles away, to do rough labor. The companies feed and house them, but they are removed from their normal environment, and, having little or no opportunity for wholesome recreation, are subject to the demoralizing influences that usually are so prevalent in mining communities. At the expiration of their term of service, many of them go back to their native villages with new vices to add to the old. Accordingly, at least one mission is making an effort to provide clean recreation—good movies, entertainments, and sports—for their leisure hours and to give

simple moral and religious instruction. In one instance the men who had been in touch with the mission showed such marked improvement when they returned home that their fellow villagers asked for missionaries.

Elevation of Women

In many localities missionaries have done much to improve the status of women. They have steadily and consistently opposed polygamy and concubinage. While among some polygamy is as much an economic as a social institution, inevitably its tendency is toward the degradation of women and against the fine companionship of monogamy at its best. In other ways—such as opposing child marriage in India—the missionary has helped to purify and elevate the ideal of marriage and the home. In the present flux of social institutions the world over, wherever they have gone, missionaries, by precept and example, have strengthened high ideals for family life.

Education

One of the missionary's major activities has been education. As we have suggested, some of the best institutions of higher learning in Japan, China, India, and the Near East were founded by missionaries, and in Negro Africa a large proportion of the schools of all grades are still maintained by them. In character, the work done by these schools varies greatly. Sometimes it gives too little training in the older culture of the country, and often it does not fit its students to meet the present problems of their own people. Increasingly, however, missionaries are attempting in the curricula of their schools to combine training in both the old and the new and to prepare the graduates to deal helpfully with the environment from which they come. Hence in Africa there is growing emphasis on simple industrial and agricultural education. In at least one place in India a mission is maintaining, with the assistance of the government, schools for children of a robber caste, to help the younger generation to give up the preda-

tory habits of their forefathers and to earn their living by such honest and useful occupations as can naturally be opened to them. In at least one mission in the South Seas, those under the influence of the mission are being trained for occupations which will give an incentive for living and so help to remove that bewilderment and that loss of interest in life which so often follow the break-up of the old culture and are important causes of decline in population.

Transformed Lives

The majority of missionaries would probably agree that the finest fruit of their work is transformed lives. Sometimes the change is wrought through the school, sometimes through the hospital, sometimes through the more obviously religious activities. That these transformations occur is one of the amazing commonplaces of the enterprise. A Chinese scholar is made over from an opium-besotted wreck to become a useful and respected member of his community. A blind beggar, coming into a church to dis-

cover how it can be robbed, hears something which eventually leads him to cancel his usurious debts against his fellow-beggars and to lead a very different life. A Turkish army officer, returning from the World War, disillusioned and restless, finds what gives him the courage to undertake a long and difficult medical course to fit himself to be of service to his people. In Sumatra scores of thousands of primitive tribesmen are, in less than a hundred years, lifted out of cannibalism and fear of each other and the unseen spirit world, into industry, respect for life, order and the kind of cheer that rejoices in the chorals which their German missionary tutors have taught them. And so the narrative might go on, for page after page, of individuals and groups helped to richer, happier, and more nearly self-controlled lives.

The Best of the Occident

That missionaries have made mistakes is undeniable. None are quicker to acknowledge them than the missionaries themselves. Here and there have been

bigots; and now and then—although with surprising infrequency—one has suffered a moral collapse. Taking the enterprise as a whole, however, it is the best that the Occident has to show for itself in its contacts with non-Occidental peoples. If, when the present age of transition has passed, the new cultures which will have emerged in the non-European world are better and not worse than their predecessors, it will be in no small degree because, when these new cultures were in process of formation, missionaries brought to bear upon them the strength and beauty of their Christian life and message. And in the meantime, through the same missionaries, countless thousands of men, women and little children are being introduced to a life of freedom and joy they would never otherwise know. These are high values, not easily set aside.

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